

Joy Inexpressible

1 Peter 1:8-12

Preface:

A Disturbing Conversation

Years ago I walked away from a conversation with a Christian brother feeling a strong sense of conviction and confusion. We had engaged in a deep discussion of ministry and theology. I probably did most of the talking and I remember talking in a very theological and academic way. He, a very warm, caring and engaging man who is currently a pastor, finished the conversation with a sentence that cut me to the quick. Amidst all my religious rhetoric he merely said, "I am just trying to get people to love Jesus." Whether he meant it to or not, that sentence made me feel guilty and short-sighted. I felt like I was giving a speech on feeding the poor and looking out into the audience I saw him actually feeding the poor. I had a sense of the conviction of the Holy Spirit. But conviction wasn't my only experience. There was confusion as well.

My confusion was produced from the fact that the Bible, which is our foundation of truth and understanding of God and things, is replete with theology. The Bible is a very long and, at times, very confusing book. My confusion grew further when, upon entering seminary, I realized that the finest Christian minds in the history of humanity (which at certain times in history meant the finest minds -- period) had written untold volumes of commentaries, systematic theologies, institutes, creeds and confessions. The Bible is the most studied, discussed, debated, systematized book in history and is the sole infallible revelation of God to the human race. My dilemma now is, **"How do I reconcile the fact that God has clearly called us to study and search out His scriptures with the academic intensity of a neuro-surgeon or astro-physicist against the heartfelt simplicity of just loving Jesus or recognizing that He loves me?"**

Anti-Thesis

What I had to first realize is the nature of an anti-thesis. In other words, what is the opposite of what or what is the enemy of what (logically speaking of course)? It is critical to understand this because it has been my observation that the enemy of our souls has sought to create in the church natural enemies out of things that are, not only not natural enemies, but dependent upon each other.

Love And Truth

For example the enemy has sought to drive a wedge between truth and love. There appears to be in the covenant camp those who are into truth and others who are into love. Those who are into love accuse those who are into truth as being cold and academic. Those who are into truth accuse those who are into love as being sappy and emotional. One group might have as their flagship verse Romans 10:2 **"For I bear them**

witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.” The others raise the banner of 1 Corinthians 8:1 **“Now concerning things offered to idols: We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies.”**

What we must understand is that love and truth are not natural enemies but are interdependent. What I mean by this is that if you don’t have God’s truth, you haven’t the slightest idea how to love. On the other hand if you have God’s truth but don’t love, you are no better (in fact you’re in a worse condition in terms of accountability) than someone who has no truth at all. Love and truth need each other and feed each other.

Knowledge And Passion

In a similar vein we have knowledge and passion. I felt convicted in my conversation with my friend because, even though I had the knowledge, he had the passion. I felt that I had missed the boat entirely. But in reflection I have to wonder if he didn’t also feel convicted due to his lack of knowledge. After all, how must Nicodemus have felt when Jesus, probably a much younger man, chided him with the words, **“Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things” (John 3:10)?** I have never considered myself to be a dispassionate man and the brother with whom I was speaking was certainly not an ignorant man, but there was a temptation in our conversation to become natural enemies. **“You can start the church of sappy emotionalism and I’ll start the church of ice cold accuracy.”** But what I think should happen, and what I hope did happen was my being convicted and challenged by his passion and his being challenged by my knowledge.

Appreciating Peter’s Groundwork

This has been quite a long introduction but I think this concept is important to grasp in order to appreciate what Peter is generating and indicating in the beginning of this epistle. In verse eight Peter, in reference to Jesus, indicates something. He writes, **“whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see *Him*, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory.”** The groundwork Peter lays leading up to this statement is steeped in theology.

Peter has taught us things about the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. His first seven verses have been nothing short of a table of contents for a systematic theology. He has taught us of election, sanctification, law, gospel, regeneration, the resurrection, heaven, faith, perseverance, eschatology, and the purpose of trials and more.

I. Loving Jesus

Peter’s Assumption

Having presented all these heavy things Peter stops and merely talks about loving Jesus. There seems to be an assumption on his part. There is an assumption that we love Jesus and that, even though we don’t see Him, by this faith that God is continually refining and growing in us, we rejoice with a joy inexpressible and full of glory. That is

quite an assumption. I guess Peter is under the impression that if we are even beginning to grasp what he is writing about, that by the grace of God, our only response is to love Jesus and rejoice in a joy inexpressible. Calvin has an understanding of this that is a bit unnerving. He writes,

“Those who are not elevated by this joy above the heavens, so that being content with Christ alone, they despise the world, in vain boast that they have faith.”¹

Why Do You Love Jesus?

So this throws a question onto the floor: Do you love Jesus? And if so, why? There are a lot of people going around talking about loving Jesus (which is wonderful) but why?

If you're sixteen year old daughter comes home telling you how she has fallen in love with the hunk down the street and you ask her why, you expect some type of substance in the answer. If she answers, “Because we look so good together” or, “Because he owns a Porsche” You're going to start to worry. Similarly when people say they love Jesus and give as their motivation things that have little depth it should concern us. The fact that God has given me a great wife, child, job or home is certainly praiseworthy but it is superficial compared to what Peter has been teaching.

Seeing The Invisible -- Faith

The primary inspiration for our love for God must lie in things that are invisible. In verses seven, eight and nine Peter's continually brings our attention to faith. Peter's indicating that these Christians love Jesus and rejoice in a joy inexpressible is surrounded by the notion of their spiritual eyes penetrating into the invisible aspects of the kingdom of God. It is the mirror of God's word revealing the atoning work of Christ on the cross. When we meditate upon the august nature and consuming righteousness of a Holy and Almighty God, then meditate upon the graciousness of God's grace and far reaching effects of His mercy to an unworthy people, it is then that the roots of our love for God are deeply implanted in a secure soil. It is in this respect that our love for Jesus is augmented by our knowledge of who He is and what He has done.

Peter, refusing to allow the love we have for Christ to find as it's motivation anything less than redemption itself, writes in verse nine, **“receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls.** Although we can be sure that God is doting over every detail of our lives we must be careful not to allow our religion and the ongoing pursuit of our faith to be reduced to our physical or emotional, well-being.

II. The Full Expression

We have before us, in full expression, a salvation that the prophets of old searched carefully to see but only saw in shadows and prophecies. The season of time, the

¹ Calvin's Commentary on 1 Peter, pp. 35.

sufferings of God's anointed and the glory that followed have been unveiled before us for our perusal. I think it is worthy of note that the prophets of the Old Testament had the Spirit of Christ and were in fact Christians. I also think this should excite us to seek out the message of Christ in the Old Testament (so much for the mountain peaks of prophecy). But the full disclosure of the Christian faith, which was first proclaimed in Eden, wouldn't happen until the birth, passion and continued glorification of the Savior.

For Us

Peter tells us that what the old prophets were told was that their message was not primarily for them (although it was clearly power unto salvation for them as well) but it was a ministry to us. I would suggest that Peter is speaking of those whom God has called, by the power of His Spirit and through the means of the preaching of the gospel, to Himself from every nation, kindred and tongue. It is the fulfillment of the great commission.

III. The Angels

And almost as an addendum Peter adds, **“things which angels desire to look into.”** The idea presented by the words ‘look into’ is looking without being watched; as an outsider. The word ‘desire’ is a word that denotes almost a longing.

The Undivided Attention Of Angels

The four gospels and the glories which follow in the building of Christ's kingdom is something the prophets of old foretold and the angels long (present tense) to see. It is not as if we, at this point, know more than the angels. The idea conveyed is that angels, aware of what has been promised to us in Christ, long to see come to fulfillment. There is something taking place that has their undivided attention.

Volleyball Match

Years ago I was introduced to a new sport called volleyball. I went to a game with a friend who was very knowledgeable of the sport. During the contest I, along with the majority of the crowd, watched what appeared to us to be the most exciting aspects of the game, which was the hitting and the blocking. I looked at my friend and saw that he was focused on something else. He kept looking in the back row. In volleyball the back row players are farthest from the net and are not allowed to spike the ball. How boring! My friend was missing all the action. Finally I said, “What are you looking at? You're missing the game.” He said, “You see that little unimpressive guy in the middle back position? His name is Stanislaus Gosciniak. Last year he was voted the most outstanding player in the world.” So I started watching him too. He was amazing. With cat-like quickness he played defense like no one on the planet. It took a trained eye to help me appreciate what I had been missing.

Grasping What The Angels See

The recipients of Peter's letter were dwarfed by the power of Rome and belittled and persecuted by the religion of Judaism. But Peter informs them that even though they may be deemed puny and insignificant by the world, angels, who see genuine reality from the perspective of heaven, have eyes that cut through the fog of prattling humanity and perceive the work of God in His kingdom and in the lives of His people. Peter paints a picture of the heavenly host and their attention my friends is on you. They lust after the glorious things God is doing for you and in you through Christ. And the more we grasp, what they know, the more we will rejoice with a joy inexpressible and full of glory.